

THE BOOK OF HOSEA

Lesson 11, Chapters 6 and 7

As of this point in Hosea (chapter 6) we have left behind the symbolic story of the always faithful Hosea married to his habitually unfaithful wife, Gomer. While Hosea and Gomer actually experienced and lived-out all that we earlier read, nonetheless it was all divinely orchestrated as an illustration of God's relationship with unfaithful Israel... which for the time being is only referring to the portion of Israel known as the Northern Kingdom, also called Ephraim/Israel. Shortly, new illustrations and different metaphors will be introduced to further describe Israel's condition and what they can expect to happen.

Let's re-read the rather short Hosea chapter 6.

RE-READ HOSEA CHAPTER 6 all

The first 3 verses of chapter 6 are Israel, collectively, speaking. Of course, this is figurative of Israel communally pleading and praising Yehoveh for His mercy and for their certainty that He will take them back as their national God. At verse 4 it switches to God doing the speaking.

Near the close of our previous lesson, I asked you to make note in your Bibles of a far-reaching principle that is only rarely ever touched upon. It is this: biblically, in all cases, when it is spoken of to "know God" or to "have knowledge of God" it is used as an expression. It doesn't mean that a person is to become aware of God, as conveyed by the common question a Christian might ask another person: do you believe in God? That is, are you aware of God to such an extent that you believe He exists? Rather to "know God" means one thing alone: it refers to a close and faithful relationship not only with the commands and laws of God's moral law code (the Law of Moses), but also with the giver of that Law: Yehoveh. Such a knowledge is completely wrapped-up in the concept of covenant. Thus, when verse 3 begins: "Let us know, let us strive to know, Yehoveh", it means aim to commit to a restored and renewed obedience to the moral principles of God's Torah, because within the Torah is the description of who God is. It is the abandonment of these principles by Israel that has led to their disastrous situation.

So, now in verse 4 God responds to Israel's declaration of verses 1 – 3. If I could sum up Yehoveh's response in just a few words it would be this: you saying to Me, "my bad, sorry about that" won't do. Admitting bad behavior is a good thing; but such an admission doesn't warrant a divine Get-Out-Of-Jail-Free card. In Christian parlance, such an admission is called a confession. But confession simply means one has acknowledged their crimes (their sin) to God. Forgiveness doesn't flow from confession; only from actual repentance. And even then, far from a deep and sincere internal sorrow for our behavior, actual change in our behavior and decisions has to occur. Not merely intent... real and lasting change. True change can take a lot of time, often depending on just how far... and for how long... one has strayed from God and His ways. Yes, God knows our hearts, but also He knows if we are serious. Then the question becomes: can we be serious and committed to real change for more than just a few hours or days? So, it is not only the seriousness of our repentance that brings forgiveness, it must include acting it out in a permanent way. At what point, exactly, does God forgive us for our confessed bad behavior? I don't know. Adding to the complication of knowing the when of it, is that being forgiven by no means indicates that the bad consequences for our actions will necessarily be taken away. Indeed, from a spiritual sense forgiveness could come rather quickly, even though the earthly consequences could be ongoing for a long time. The consequences for Israel have gone on for 27 centuries!

One of my favorite movies is "Oh Brother Where Art Thou". It might sound like a Christian film, but it is not. The setting is the Depression era South when 3 not very smart criminals escape from a chain gang and now are trying to outrun the law. At one point they have stolen a car. They are driving down a serene country road when suddenly they hear faint singing off in the distance. One of the escapees hollers for the driver to stop the car immediately. He jumps out, runs straight to where the voices are coming from, and there at a lake are a line of people in white robes singing while waiting to be being baptized. He dashes to the front of the line and gets dunked. Walking back to the car he has a look of complete relief on his face and in his body language. He suggests that his fellow thugs should do the same because as he says: "All my sins are forgiven, and that includes the Piggly Wiggly that I knocked off". As they continue their journey he's explaining to the other two that he's now free and clear, so there's nothing more

for him to worry about. The leader of the pack, however, suggests that perhaps the Good Lord has forgiven him, but he's not so sure that the Governor of Mississippi is going to take a similar view. This is, I believe, a comical but most apt illustration of how our sins are dealt with in the Heavenly sphere as opposed to the Earthly sphere. As such it also represents how God is about to explain to a seemingly repentant, but still wayward, Israel that although a measure of forgiveness will eventually occur, nonetheless on earth there will be a long series of just punishments for their long-running and determined offenses against Him.

So, verse 4 begins with a sort of sarcastic "What should I do for you (or with or to you) Ephraim and for you Judah"? Clearly (at least clearly to me and to a number of biblical scholars) there's an issue here; the mention of Judah at this point seems very much out of place. Back in chapter 1, after God has pronounced judgment against Ephraim/Israel, saying He will show them no pity (or no mercy), He next says:

CJB Hosea 1:7 But I will pity the house of Y'hudah; I will save them not by bow, sword, battle, horses or cavalry, but by ADONAI their God."

Thus, for the time-being, Judah isn't going to be subjected to God's wrath because they are not behaving the same as Israel. Yet, here we encounter in Hosea 6:4 the inclusion of Judah in the same judgment Israel is to receive. I am most reluctant *ever* to question the correctness of Holy Scripture as we have it; yet we must always remember that we do not possess the originals, but rather only copies, and very often from varying sources. And, all ancient copies were hand copied... an enormous task. Further because sometimes we possess multiple copies of various Bible books that have come from different ancient sources we'll find that they don't all perfectly match; there can be very slight differences. Human beings did the copying; human beings can make simple copyist mistakes and they can also add things for what they believe is the sake of clarity... or something they think needs to be said in hindsight. Sometimes they may have been right to do so, at other times not. The bottom line is that there is just no way that the word "Judah" belongs here. Even historically we know that God's judgment wouldn't come against Judah for another 130 years after Israel's, and the judgment would come from a different enemy and play out quite differently; Israel's from Assyria, the people scattered over multiple continents,

and for nearly 3 millennia... Judah's from Babylon, the people taken off together in a relatively compact area, and exiled for less than 100 years. Since over and over we find the use of couplets in Hosea (you can refer to earlier lessons if you don't remember what a couplet is), then I have no doubt that a later editor substituted Judah for Israel (probably around the time Judah was invaded, or not long after Amos had written his prophecy about Judah). Thus, the opening of this verse nearly certainly originally said: "What should I do to you Ephraim? What should I do to you Israel?", because Ephraim and Israel are regularly employed in couplet form throughout the Book of Hosea.

Continuing in verse 4, Israel is told that what they insist is "faithful love" towards Yehoveh is like a cloud in the morning, or the dew that forms early in the day; something that appears and then quickly dissipates. That is, it is sincere for an instant and then it is not. Their "faithful love" is neither faithful nor love. Time and again the Holy Scriptures pound home that loving God means obeying God. We can insist we love Him, even demonstrating the warmest feelings towards Him...but the only way He accepts our love as love is in the form of obedience. Obedience to what? Obedience to the Law of Moses, the one and only divinely given moral code that exists in the Bible, Old and New Testaments.

It seems to me that our loving and merciful God is showing us (in humanly emotional terms) a sense of a current hopelessness of Israel's condition. Every attempt He has made to get their attention in order to reform them has ended in failure. In one sense verse 4 is a rhetorical question, but in another sense it is a statement of reality. He is certainly not inquiring of Israel about how He ought to go about dealing with them. Rather, He is responding as an exasperated father to a defiant child. Therefore, God says in verse 5 that it is because of all these frustrated efforts on His part to cure Israel's rebelliousness that He (metaphorically speaking) cuts them to pieces by the prophets and slays them by the words of His mouth. So, verse 5 answers the rhetorical question asked in verse 4 as to what is to be done to Ephraim/Israel.

Hearing what the ancient Jewish Rabbis and scholars have to say about various passages in the Holy Scriptures can prove to be quite instructional, and need to be taken very seriously. The venerable Rashi says the essence of what verse 5 means is: "Because I warned you through the agency of the prophets and you did

not repent, I brought upon you death because you, Israel, transgressed The Word, which expressed My will; and now my judicial punishment comes forth as light". Speaking of God's judgment going forth as light is not meant in the good sense as light is usually presented in the Bible. Rather, light is here used as a metaphor in the sense that light bursts forth complete and all at once. You can no more stop the light than you can stop the earth from rotating. Further, light exposes and reveals what had been hidden in darkness. That God's own people, Israel, have these divinely caused calamities happening to them reveals for all to see that the cause is their sinfulness and unfaithfulness.

Verse 6 must be one of the most quoted and misused verses in all of Holy Scripture. It says this:

CJB Hosea 6:6 *For what I desire is mercy, not sacrifices, knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.*

This is regularly used in the Christian faith to prove that the Law of Moses is abolished and that the sacrificial system was at best deficient and at worst a complete failure. It is disappointing that such a mistruth is told and repeated, if not embedded, in the worldview of the institutional Church, and reform is needed. Let's begin mid-verse with the key phrase "knowledge of God". Recall what I taught you earlier; to know God or to have knowledge of God means one thing alone in the Bible; to be devoted, loyal and obedient to the Law and, consequently, to the Law giver (or vice versa). Here is what God is explaining: but first, understand that the sacrifices of the kind mentioned here have only to do with sins, and have nothing to do with vow sacrifices, or thanksgiving sacrifices, or Firstfruits sacrifices, etc; only sin. The sacrificial system as regards sin is a means to rescue humans from the death they justly deserve for their offenses against God. This rescue is accomplished by means of substituting a fully innocent creature on the sinner's behalf. Thus, if one had knowledge of God (obedience and devotion to the Law and to the Law giver) that would necessarily result in God's people showing mercy (instead of harm) to our fellow man, and therefore no sacrifice of burnt offering would even be needed because there would be no crimes for which atonement would be necessary.

It's like telling your angry child after you've just sentenced him to being grounded for the weekend that such a punishment would not exist or occasionally applied if they'd just obey the house rules. As a parent we tell them that we would prefer NEVER to have to ground you because we love you; we get no joy in it. But, because you disobey and do wrong we have instituted a grounding system to try to rescue you from doing something even worse, and hopefully through this punishment see that obedience is the better path.

It is most interesting that Yeshua actually referred to this Hosea passage in one of His teachings.

CJB Matthew 9:10-15 ***¹⁰ While Yeshua was in the house eating, many tax-collectors and sinners came and joined him and his talmidim at the meal. ¹¹ When the P'rushim saw this, they said to his talmidim, "Why does your rabbi eat with tax-collectors and sinners?" ¹² But Yeshua heard the question and answered, "The ones who need a doctor aren't the healthy but the sick. ¹³ As for you, go and learn what this means: 'I want compassion rather than animal-sacrifices.' For I didn't come to call the 'righteous,' but sinners!" ¹⁴ Next, Yochanan's talmidim came to him and asked, "Why is it that we and the P'rushim fast frequently, but your talmidim don't fast at all?" ¹⁵ Yeshua said to them, "Can wedding guests mourn while the bridegroom is still with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them; then they will fast.***

In one sense Jesus was saying to the Pharisees that if they really had open minds to understand who He is, they'd help Him...even join Him... instead of plotting against Him. In another sense Yeshua is pointing out the Pharisees' increasing concern with ritualistic and mechanical religion and rules (that are the result of their manmade doctrines), always thinking it was this that would please Yehoveh even though it was actually their defiled inner spiritual condition that made them unacceptable to God. Compassion and mercy are words that express the fundamental God-principle of: "Love your neighbor". Please hear this, if you hear nothing else today: If we don't love our neighbor, all the ritual and religion and rules-following in the world will never make us acceptable to God.

Beginning in verse 7 God justifies His refusal to accept Israel's repentance, which He sees as fleeting and thus insincere.

CJB Hosea 6:7 *"But they, just like men, have broken the covenant, they have been faithless in dealing with me.*

Other Bible versions deal with this difficult verse differently.

NRS Hosea 6:7 *But at Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.*

NAS Hosea 6:7 *But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant; There they have dealt treacherously against Me.*

This issue is with the Hebrew word **adam**. It can mean human being; or it can mean the name of the first man; or it can mean the name of an actual biblical place... of a city. Good cases have been made for every one of these possibilities and I think it's a toss-up. The meaning is ambiguous. The important thing to notice is that the unfaithfulness of Israel is realized in their breaking of the covenant. Since the Book of Exodus, the term "the covenant", when standing alone, means the covenant God gave to Israel on Mt. Sinai: the Covenant of Moses... the Law. This works hand in glove to prove our correct understanding of the term "knowledge of God" as meaning obedience to the Covenant of Moses and (automatically) to the One who gave it. Therefore, God sees Israel transgressing the Covenant of Moses (that is, breaking the laws contained in the covenant) as dealing treacherously against Him in a most personal way. Such treachery is not remedied in a sudden burst of repentance. This treachery has gone on for so long, and its net has been cast so wide, that sin is now utterly woven into Israel's very fabric of society and consciousness. Even when we recognize sin, we can't ever instantly recognize all of it. And even when we sincerely begin to deal with our unfaithfulness to God, we can never deal with all of its aspects all at once. Sometimes it can be a long road back.

Verse 8 speaks of the place, Gilead, as being a city of criminals, so it might mean that when verse 7 speaks of Adam, it is speaking of the city called Adam (and I lean that direction). In any case, it is hard to know which Gilead this might be speaking about. Gilead technically refers to territory on the east side of the Jordan River that centuries earlier had been conquered and then occupied by the

Israelite tribes of Gad, Reuben and Manasseh. There is another place called Ramoth-Gilead where Elisha anointed Jehu as king of Israel. There are other Gileads as well. So, I'm not going to venture a guess as to which one this is speaking of. One clue about what this might be referring to, however, is that we're about to enter some passages in Hosea that are referring to the long series of short-lived kings of Israel, and that's where the reference to Gilead might come into play. 2Kings 15 addresses this in some detail, and we'll read this together at the end of today's lesson. There we find a mention of 50 men from a city called Gilead who conspired with Pekah son of Remaliahu to murder Israel's sitting king, a fellow of the same name but whose father was King Menahem. So, there were two Pekah's, one immediately after the other, that sat on Ephraim/Israel's throne. This would happen around 735 B.C., just a little more than a decade before Israel would be attacked and exiled by Assyria.

Verse 9 swings us back to the priests of Israel that God considers as idolaters and here also paints them as murderers and thugs. The question is whether these priests actually do ambush people and kill them, or if this is meant as a metaphor. All the way back to chapter 4, our prophet has been accusing the priests of Israel as leading the people into sin and unfaithfulness. Now they don't know the difference between right and wrong... even though they think they do. This is speaking of the problem of the manmade religion and the resultant doctrines that come with it, which Israel's priests have fashioned over the past century. So, it seems to me, that the priests are being likened to a gang of bloodthirsty bandits.

It's easy, because it is self-evident, to point a finger at manmade doctrines as one of the chief reasons for Israel's fall; it is also why our Christian faith for centuries has wandered so far from its Hebraic heritage. What's harder is to state is exactly what the problem is; what these doctrines always seem to lead to, out of which comes so many sins and deceptions. In my simplistic terms it is that our foundational sense of justice and mercy... what our choices and behaviors reveal ... which is the bedrock of God's command to love our fellow man as ourselves...is not the same as Yehoveh's nor is it what He has commanded. A. J. Heschel says this about that issue: **"Man's sense of injustice is a poor analogy to God's sense of injustice. The exploitation of the poor is to us a misdemeanor; to**

God it's a disaster. Our reaction is disapproval; God's reaction is something no language can convey".

Hebrews and gentile Christians alike have always, it seems, had a propensity to try and adapt God's sense of justice and mercy as revealed in the Bible to better keep with what it is our culture prefers. Our Western culture admires prosperity, and looks down at poverty. We have taken some of the sins that God lists as the most grievous (murder, adultery, idolatry, blasphemy), and our obligation to help the poor, and diminished them. When I taught the Torah I asked folks to notice how one of the surest ways to understand how God prioritizes the seriousness of sins is the punishment handed out for each. The four I just mentioned are the most serious, and this is characterized by all them requiring the death penalty. In Western society, of the four, only the first is even a crime and only in a few places does a murderer still face the death penalty. The other 3 are considered as personal preference with no consequence. Even in Christian settings at times these are tolerated with only the most minor of consequences, if any whatsoever. Why is that? Because manmade doctrine has pushed aside God's definitions of right and wrong, evil and good, what is criminal and what is not, what is justice and what is not, and replaced these with our own. And, in the so doing, we are quite certain that we must be right because most of us agree on it...and we like it... and feel good about it. God labels this as treachery against Him.

In verse 9 another place name is mentioned: Shechem. No doubt all these places must be associated to the Northern Kingdom's territory. Shechem was a major religious and political center and had been so since the time of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Priests are said to commit murder there. Again, the question is: is this murder literal or metaphorical? Some Rabbis say this is referring to Jacob's sons massacring the residents of Shechem in revenge for the rape of their sister, Dinah. I can't buy into that because this verse is about priests and not Israel in general, and the Levites aren't blamed for the Shechem massacre. In the end, it seems most plausible to me that the listing of place names (of which I think Adam is one) is meant as representative of what goes on in the entire territory of Israel; that is, there are no enclaves in Israel where good is being done. It might be like saying from Los Angeles, to Chicago, to New York, as representing the entire USA.

I think this idea of the 3 place names as representative of all of the territory of the 10 northern tribes is further bolstered by verse 10, which is kind of a summary. After calling out 3 specific places, the conclusion is that the House of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) ... all of it and everywhere...has done, and is doing, something terrible. They are engaging in prostitution (metaphorically). That is, idolatry is rampant throughout. The result is that Israel is defiled; they have become unclean. The Hebrew word rendered unclean in English is **tameh**. Let's pause for a moment so I can explain something about exactly what unclean (**tameh**) actually means.

Food is probably a little easier illustration to work with, but it largely works the same for classifying people. There are entirely separate laws in the Torah concerning what is permissible and what is prohibited, versus what is clean and unclean. All these terms are often thought to be, and are used as, two ways to say the same thing; they most definitely are not. It works like this: what is permissible (whether it is food, behavior, or humans) is applied only to God's people. In a sense, then, gentiles who don't worship Israel's God are not permissible people; they lay outside the system. I know that's an awkward way to say it, but the point is to explain the difference between not-permissible and unclean. Hebrews on the other hand, as God's people by birth, are permissible and lay inside the system. Food is the same. The food list as found in Leviticus 11 has nothing to do with clean and unclean; it has to do only with what is permissible and not permissible. Once something is identified as permissible now the laws about clean and unclean come into play.

Any permissible thing always begins in a state of ritual cleanness. However, a permissible thing can be rendered not usable for its purpose (made unclean, **tameh**) through improper handling or a few other factors. So, for instance, beef is a permissible food for Israel. In its natural state it is clean and can be eaten. However, if the cow were to not be butchered correctly, or if too much blood was allowed to remain in its meat, or should the meat be left exposed and an unclean mouse tromps around all over it, then the beef becomes unclean and therefore not usable. Pig on the other hand is inherently not permissible as food in the first place. So, there is no such thing as something being not-permissible, but clean. Not permissible automatically excludes its use, so unclean or clean doesn't apply.

So, in verse 10, Israel (a permissible people in a manner of speaking), and therefore Israel in its natural state is ritually clean, can for any number of reasons become ritually defiled... unclean. One of the ways an Israelite can become unclean is to commit a sin against God. What I call a wash and a wait (that is, being immersed in water and then a certain prescribed amount of time passes) can cleanse the unclean condition of that permissible person (this, by the way, is separate from atonement). However, a gentile non-Believer can't do this, because they are not a member of the permissible people. They can't be defiled because clean and unclean can only apply to that which is permissible, and they aren't.

Therefore, in our passage, permissible Israel has, through its sin of idolatry, been rendered unclean and therefore not usable for the purpose God created them. Still, they can be made clean and brought back to their natural state.

Verse 11 again mentions Judah. One of two things is happening here: either the entire verse is a gloss written in by a Judean some years later, or it is original and the idea is to say that in time both Judah and Israel will suffer in similar ways. As with so much of Hosea, scholars disagree over whether the term "harvest" is meant in the positive or the negative sense. That is, that the harvest of the exiles represents a restoration. And yet, biblically, the term harvest is nearly always taking us to the era of the End Times, and it speaks of people and things during a period of End Times judgment. Some harvested to their good, others harvested to their everlasting unpleasantness. I can only offer you my opinion, without being particularly rigid about it. I think in this case the word Judah belongs here. Yes, it might be a gloss and not original. But, assuming that it is original, the tone of it is that even though Judah and Israel will suffer a similar fate, those fates will be separated by time and circumstances. To say it another way: Israel's judgment is now, Judah's comes later. But since exile will be the result, the judgments for both are similar. Let's move on to Hosea chapter 7.

READ HOSEA CHAPTER 7 all

Verse 1 more or less has God saying: I wanted to heal Israel from their iniquity, but the closer I looked the gravity of their sin and depravation became all the more apparent, and that it emanated from Samaria. Samaria (*Shomron* in

Hebrew) was the seat of government in Israel. The idea is that the political center of Israel bears much blame for the condition of Israel. I could probably detour here and easily spend the remainder of today's lesson on it... but I won't. Suffice it to say that nations are defined by their capitals and those who govern from there. While each human is individually responsible for our own sin and our own moral condition, the reality is that perhaps the greatest influence over a person's life will come from their government because they control so much of what is possible. The leadership bears a far larger proportion of responsibility for the moral state of a nation than a single citizen at large. Is violence and crime rampant? Look to your national leadership. Is your economy in a shambles? Look to your national leadership. Has your nation lost its sense of ethics and morality? Look to your national leadership. And when, as with Ephraim/Israel, things seem to be imploding on every level and hopelessness abounds, look to your national leadership. This is God's stated worldview; it's not of my making. However, also note that God sees national leadership as consisting of both the politicians and the priests. The religious leadership cannot say, "it's not us, it's those darned politicians"! Every nation, ancient or modern, needs politicians. History teaches us that the more authoritarian and further from God that a national government gets, the more the politicians attack those among the nation's religious institutions that won't bend to their moral mindset, or to their plans and social agenda. So, a strong religious establishment is needed to speak up and act with courage and boldness to counter-balance the politicians. What happens when the counter-balance ceases being that and instead becomes little more than the religious apologists *for* the politicians? That nation tips into disaster. This is what we are viewing in the Book of Hosea.

We get an example of what I was just speaking about in the 2nd half of verse 1 when we're told that: ***For they keep practicing deceit; thieves break in, bands of robbers raid outside.*** Unchecked deception and lying, criminals breaking into homes, and gangs lying in wait for victims are all connected in cause and source.

Verse 2 is essentially what verse 1 explained, but with a little more detail. The idea includes that the leadership is being confronted with enemies attacking them, rampant criminality, their economy failing, the people are behaving irresponsibly and despite the warning from the prophets they still don't ascribe it to their own wickedness and lack of faithfulness to Yehoveh.

Beginning with verse 3 we get into the grisly murders of several kings of Israel; each murder committed by a man who wants to be king. Very likely the overall period of time that this would be carried out spans from around 750 to 725 B.C. This is recorded in 2Kings 15 and it is worth our while to read it.

READ 2KINGS 15 all

We'll pick up next week at Hosea 7 verse 3.